

First piping plover nest of the season found at Cape Henlopen – and an American oystercatcher nest, too

LEWES – Recent wet weather has not deterred beachnesting birds from beginning their nesting season at Cape Henlopen State Park – with this year's first piping plover nest found late last week on the Point, along with an American oystercatcher nest also discovered there.

"We estimate that there are four or five pairs of plovers that have set up territories at Cape Henlopen State Park so far, which is right in line with the schedule the plovers have kept to in previous years," said Wildlife Biologist Matthew Bailey of the Division of Fish & Wildlife's Beachnester Monitoring Program. "One of our best tools for finding plover nests is following the birds' tracks, which can lead a plover monitor to eggs nestled in a small dent in the sand. The current weather conditions have made the sand too wet for plovers to leave tracks, so there may be more nests out there still waiting to be discovered."

With beach season coming soon, Bailey added that "Plover Patrol" volunteers are needed to help protect Delaware's endangered piping plovers and other beachnesting birds. Anyone interested in joining DNREC's beachnester monitoring team is invited to a training session from 10 a.m. to noon Saturday, May 14, at Cape Henlopen State Park's Biden Environmental Training Center, 15099 Cape Henlopen Drive, Lewes, DE 19958.

The training session will begin with a slideshow followed by a discussion on the monitoring program and how volunteers can help to ensure that beachnesting shorebirds are not disturbed

while nesting and rearing their chicks. Weather permitting, the group will head out to the Point at Cape Henlopen to look for piping plovers and other shorebirds. Birding scopes and binoculars will be available for use, but volunteers are encouraged to bring their own optics if they have them.

Preregistration for the training is encouraged, but attendees also will be accepted at the door. Park entrance fees will be waived for volunteers attending the training by notifying the fee booth attendant. For more information on the training, beachnesting birds or monitoring efforts, please contact Matthew Bailey at 302-382-4151 or email matthew.bailey@delaware.gov.

About the piping plover

The piping plover was listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1986, and the Division of Fish and Wildlife is responsible for its protection in Delaware. Under a binding agreement and species management plan that DNREC made in 1990 with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) – the federal agency with oversight of this ESA-protected species – piping plover nesting areas at Cape Henlopen State Park are closed annually to the public to protect the shorebirds from disturbance during their nesting season from March into September. The closure, which includes the Point and smaller areas around Gordon's Pond and with both feeding habitat and nesting areas protected, has been successful, increasing the number of piping plover nesting pairs from a low of two pairs to a high of nine pairs. Piping plovers feed on small invertebrates that inhabit the intertidal zone near their nesting territories. Chicks are not fed by their parents, but rather are led to the shoreline to forage while the adults keep watch for potential threats. Allowing pedestrian traffic in the intertidal zone adjoining nesting areas would disturb the vital link between nesting and foraging habitat and risk adverse stress or mortality to the chicks.

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